

Editorial

Dear reader,

The last six months have been relatively quiet in terms of headline news from Africa, but there are stories of note. Northern Africa and the Sahel-region have figured in the news: the court-case against Hosni Mubarak in Egypt came to an end when the former president was released, and nobody knows how long the current unrest in the country will continue under the military-backed government; the French military intervention against rebels in northern Mali continues, and although Mali voted in parliamentary elections earlier this week, the resurgence in violence since the presidential election in August suggests Islamists and Tuareg secessionists still have the upper hand in parts of the country; and the newest country in Africa, South Sudan, is struggling to survive the economic, military and political turmoil it finds itself in.

There was good news from South Africa, where reconciliation-icon Nelson Mandela was released from hospital after an anxious period in which the entire nation (and the world) had been preparing to bid a final farewell to Madiba.¹ Also, earlier this year economic markets expressed a high level of confidence about Africa, as the World Bank forecast that in the period 2013-2015 economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa would exceed 5%. South Africa is still the biggest and most promising economy on the continent, though much depends on the ways in which the government will be able to channel the recent surge of labour unrest. A recent Belgian economic mission to southern Africa combined South Africa with Angola, thus hinting at European investors' growing economic interest in Africa.

It is unfortunate however, that the stories that appear in the West do not include coverage of the kind of constructive and innovative work generated by academic collaboration between African and western universities. The media in the West does not appear to be interested in giving exposure to joint research projects or joint education programmes that result in capacity building for southern scholars and/or new data and research opportunities for academics in the north. It seems that they would rather pursue conventional reporting on human suffering in Africa, and on donor programmes or other aid initiatives initiated by the north. In general, the west does not seem to care about presenting a hopeful image of Africa.

The Africa Platform of the Ghent University Association and its journal *Afrika Focus* have always tried to focus on academic expertise in Africa and on academic north-south collaboration. Through its annual conference and its journal the Africa Platform offers a forum in which African academics and northern scholars working on Africa can forge new and often interdisciplinary collaboration. Most of this research on Africa is highly relevant to the development of African societies, as became clear at the last symposium of

¹ This editorial was written just a few days before Nelson Mandela passed away on 5 December 2013. We have lost a great man. Hamba Kahle Madiba.

the Africa Platform, entitled 'Africa: (post-development)'. This special issue of Afrika Focus contains a number of articles that were presented at that symposium, which took place on 7 December 2012.

In his article 'Performance, poverty and urban development: Kigali's motari and the special city' Rollason describes the conflict between motorcycle taxis in Kigali and the city authorities. Urban development of Kigali is at stake here as these motari do not seem to match the image of the city the government wants to present. The article by Debusscher 'Gender equality in European Union development policy: incorporating women's voices or confirming hierarchies?' is highly critical of the gender mainstreaming approach of the EU in its development aid towards sub-Saharan Africa. The EU seems to be more concerned with reaching its policy goals rather than challenging existing power structures in Africa. Both of these articles raise awareness on the level of a particular development-related issue, and they have the potential to lead to concrete recommendations for national or EU development policies.

The three remaining articles in this issue do not fit in with the development-topic. Mulamba's article 'Luba folklore and women's ethno-gendered discourse of wifhood in "Cintu Wa Bujitu"', throws light on the socialization function of the Lubà folk song, a folkloric tradition that seems to perpetuate gender inequalities. Naphulo's linguistic article ('Teacher and learner beliefs and expectations about English language teaching at a Mozambican university') critically analyses English language teaching in tertiary institutions. The conclusion is that cultural backgrounds and beliefs need to be considered in order to enable effective teaching. The final article of this issue ('Arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi associated with shade trees and *Coffea arabica* L. in a coffee-based agroforestry system in Bonga, Southwestern Ethiopia') examines coffee production and describes how a certain type of fungi could be used as a (natural) alternative to chemical fertilizers, so as to enhance coffee production in the forest areas of Ethiopia. All three of these articles indicate that traditional knowledge – be it linguistic, cultural or botanic – always plays an important role when trying to gain insight into African societies or when trying to improve practices and policies related to education, health care or agriculture. This is an idea that should as a matter of course be a consideration when designing research in an African context.

We like to remind the reader that in addition to fully-fledged articles, Afrika Focus also publishes reports of doctoral research or field work. In this issue we offer you four reports of PhDs defended at Ghent University. All four of these PhD degrees were obtained by African scholars, thus testifying to the vibrant research collaboration that exists between African institutions and this Western European university. These current reports belong to the domains of Biology and Marine Biology, Linguistics and Health Care.

Finally, Afrika Focus is extremely proud to announce that the journal (both the paper edition and the online version) has been indexed by the Flemish Academic Bibliographic Database and the renowned International Bibliography of Social Sciences. Afrika Focus is now clearly an internationally recognized journal, both on the level of content and on the level of its international peer-reviewing process. To add to its visibility, Afrika Focus is now also active on social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and it has subscribed to academia.edu.

I have to conclude with some household rules: as of 2014 there will be a small increase in the annual subscription to Afrika Focus. The new prices are as follows: 50 euro for institutions, 35 euro for individuals and 30 euro for a single copy. A gift subscription to an African institutions will costs 60 euro from next year onwards.

We do hope that you will enjoy reading this issue of our quality journal on Africa. We are convinced that Africa is the continent of the future and we can assure you that the research output presented in this issue is a reflection of very promising academic dynamics on the African continent.

Best wishes,

Annelies Verdoolaege
Editor-in-Chief